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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5969
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7517
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 NEW DELHI 000342

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SUBJECT: A RECHARGED BJP PUTS ITS HOUSE IN ORDER

REF: A. NEW DELHI 316

[B](#). 07 MUMBAI 722

[C](#). 07 NEW DELHI 5278

[D](#). 07 NEW DELHI 3031

[1](#). (SBU) Summary: On the heels of its sweeping victories in the Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat state assembly elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) national executive meeting on January 27-29 revealed a party reinvigorated with energy and direction. Unlike the previous national executive meeting where a power struggle was at play, at this meeting the party clearly coalesced around a single man, L.K. Advani, as its leader and prime ministerial candidate. The meeting also marked the emergence on the national level of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who shattered the anti-incumbency myth by returning to power a third consecutive time in Gujarat (ref B). BJP President Rajnath Singh called on BJP Chief Ministers to emulate Modi and his winning message of development and good governance. The BJP leadership attacked the "Delhi Sultanate" of the current UPA government for its weak leadership, softness on terror, minority appeasement, and policies that led to uneven economic development for rural and urban citizens. As an alternative, the BJP offered a financial package it claimed would benefit rural farmers and the urban working middle class. The BJP leadership acknowledged the importance of allies and the need to strengthen the NDA coalition. The BJP message balanced Hindutva issues to galvanize its base with development solutions to expand a strong NDA coalition. Over the next month, Singh and Advani will travel across the country generating support for the BJP and gearing up for national elections. Throughout the meeting, the BJP appeared reenergized, united, disciplined, and ready to wrest power from the UPA. End Summary.

Advani Takes the Helm

[2](#). (U) The January 27-29 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national executive meeting revealed the makeover of a party which only a few months before seemed in disarray (ref D). Whereas tension marred the relationship between BJP President Rajnath Singh and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha

L.K. Advani at the previous national executive meeting in June 2007, unity was the inescapable sentiment this time. No longer were various personalities vying for the coveted top job - L.K. Advani had already been selected as the candidate for Prime Minister, first by the BJP in December 2007 (ref C) and then by the NDA coalition in January 2008 (ref A). All BJP leaders coalesced around Advani, with Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi going so far as to say, Advani was the greatest gift given to the BJP.

Narendra Modi, A Star Rises on the National Stage

13. (U) Drawing a standing ovation which lasted several minutes, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who defied anti-incumbency to win an unprecedented third consecutive term in Gujarat (ref B) was the most sought after leader at the meeting. A controversial figure due to his government's failings in the 2002 Gujarat riots, his sometimes abrasive personality and his often combative style, Modi's successful 2007 campaign in Gujarat was closely studied for lessons to be used in the coming state and national elections. Despite his connection to the riots, Modi raised the development indicators in Gujarat in a variety of areas, including infrastructure, education, employment, power, and sanitation.

Modi's argument that the impact of development reached Gujaratis regardless of religion or caste affiliations resonated strongly with Gujarati voters. Singh called on all BJP Chief Ministers, and particularly those in BJP-led states (Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh) going to polls in 2008 to emulate Modi in order to succeed.

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14. (U) In his address to the party, Modi seemed geared up for a larger national role by touching on national campaign issues instead of talking about Gujarat. Adding to the Modi hype and to continue raising his profile, Modi's Gujarat Government took a page from Uttar Pradesh Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Chief Minister Mayawati's playbook and ran full page advertisements in numerous major newspapers in Northern India, including The Hindu and The Tribune. These advertisements highlighted Gujarat as a model of development made possible by good governance and donned large pictures of Modi, who is making himself the poster boy for the BJP.

Attacking Congress and the UPA Government

15. (U) Advani, Modi, and the rest of the BJP leadership pounded the "Delhi Sultanate" of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government mercilessly. They characterized the UPA as an ineffective and weak government, describing the Prime Minister as being under the thumb of Congress, UPA President Sonia Gandhi and the communists. In addition to attacking the government on not having a national security agenda, Modi claimed that the UPA government stymied his efforts to implement laws addressing terrorism in Gujarat. Modi and others raised the traditional Hindutva issues such as the UPA being soft on terror for considering clemency for Afzal Guru, one of the people convicted in connection with the December 2001 attack on Parliament.

16. (U) Modi charged the UPA with promoting religious conversions through its plan to give more budgetary allocations for development in minority-dominated districts and raising priority lending for minorities to 15 percent. Describing these proposals as communal budgeting, the BJP alleged the UPA and Congress will cause mass conversions to Islam and Christianity through such minority appeasement policy initiatives. He argued that poverty does not know religion or caste and charged the UPA with fragmenting society at the cost of effective development.

17. (U) The BJP characterized the UPA coalition as an unnatural alliance that is falling apart. BJP President

Rajnath Singh claimed that Telangana Rashta Samiti (TRS) and Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) have left the UPA combine. He additionally observed that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Mayawati had been publicly denigrating the Congress party and predicted an impending split. And, he noted the Left Front's relationship with Congress as tenuous at best after falling out over the U.S.-Indo civil nuclear deal.

¶8. (U) Advani railed at a failed and worthless UPA for not doing enough for the common man. Aside from increasing tax rates and delivering high cost housing, education, and medical care, Advani rhetorically asked what the UPA had done to improve the living conditions of the poor or middle class in India. He also attacked Sonia Gandhi's Italian origin and the UPA's disconnect with the populace on culturally sensitive issues like Ram Sethu. Advani charged the UPA with being weak, morally bankrupt and ineffective and offered the BJP/NDA as a far better alternative.

The BJP Alternative: Representing the Poor Farmers

¶9. (U) During the national executive meeting, the BJP highlighted economic proposals it claimed would benefit both rural farmers and the urban middle class. In fact, none of these proposals differ greatly from what the UPA is trying to accomplish, but the BJP is using these proposals as another dig at the UPA's ineffective governance. The BJP provided an eight page resolution on agricultural reforms it claims need to be adopted to address the plight of farmers and rural Indians. The BJP promised to provide relief to indebted farmers who have been committing suicide across the

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country. In order to ameliorate the suffering of farmers, in its economic resolution, the BJP pledged to write off farmer loans up to 50,000 rupees (USD 1,250) regardless of whether they borrowed from a private or public institution. (Note: India's agricultural crisis, however, is more related to archaic laws and farming methods. Merely writing away loans is unlikely to stop farmers from committing suicide or solving the problem. What is needed is large scale systemic changes which the BJP may find hard to implement just as the current UPA government is struggling to do so. End Note.)

¶10. (U) The BJP also asserted that the Land Acquisition Act was being misused by the government and leading to situations like Nandigram. The BJP proposal provides farmers whose land is acquired shareholder status in whatever project develops on that land. Additionally, the BJP proposed an amendment to the legislation to ensure that fertile and irrigated land would not be acquired until all other options have been exhausted, so as to not cause volatile situations like Nandigram.

The BJP Alternative: Representing the Growing Middle Class

¶11. (U) In order to maintain its appeal with its traditional base - the middle class - and expand that appeal to the growing young middle class, the BJP offered messages of change for them too. By promising lower interest rates for housing and education and proposing an increase in the personal income tax threshold, the BJP hopes to strike a chord not only with rural farmers - through agricultural proposals - but also with the urban middle class regardless of age.

Wooing the Women Voters

¶12. (U) In an attempt to woo women voters, the BJP amended its party Constitution to reserve 33 percent of the positions in the party for women. It claimed that this was a precursor to giving 33 percent reservations for women in Parliament,

which has been considered and defeated before as the Women's Reservation Bill. Political observers see this as a smart move to counter the UPA led by Sonia Gandhi.

Hitting the Road

¶13. (U) With momentum from state election wins in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarkhand, and Gujarat, Advani and Singh are planning to hit the road for the next month. They will hold rallies throughout the country in an effort to generate excitement for their party, woo new partners to the coalition, and to offer the BJP/NDA combine as a viable alternative.

Comment: Saffron Sunrise

¶14. (SBU) After the slew of state wins, the BJP is recharged, pumped, and ready to take on the UPA, which is seen as becoming increasingly indecisive and cautious. The stark difference between the last national executive meeting in June 2007 after a loss in Uttar Pradesh and this meeting show the BJP resurgent. With Advani tapped as the undisputed BJP and NDA coalition leader going into the polls, the bickering and power plays have reached a lull for the moment. There is still a quiet struggle in the next generation of leaders, particularly between Rajnath Singh and Narendra Modi, who both have strong desires to succeed Advani.

¶15. (SBU) After thumping Congress in Gujarat, the BJP sees victory closer at hand on the national level. It has put its house in order and seems to have gotten down to the business of winning the next general election. With elections in ten

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states in 2008, the BJP will pay particular attention to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, where there are already BJP-led governments. It will try to use the Modi playbook to fight the anti-incumbency factor in these states.

Observers are watching closely and debating whether the BJP can succeed in transferring the Gujarat model to other states. What is not for debate, however, is the tremendous momentum with which the BJP is entering 2008. As Advani and Singh hit the road, Hindutva will play a role in selected areas, constituencies and voter groups, but the overall message will be a softer one that appeals to its NDA coalition partners and a majority of the Indian electorate.
End Comment.

MULFORD